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ABSTRACT

The development and delivery of child care services in Canada has never been without controversy. This case study examines the development of the child care system in Alberta, Canada, showing how the role of the government proceeded through four distinct phases, each determining a different outcome for child care stakeholders. Power mechanisms and covert policy making are described as mitigating against strengthening the child care system in Alberta, including failing to develop a bureaucratic infrastructure, creating tensions in the child care community, limiting resources for policy implementation, and delaying action by studying the issues. The study notes that under the tenets of neo-conservatism, the current fifth phase is redefining the child care paradigm and has resulted in the marginalization of child care. The neo-conservative principles of decreased government spending, privatization, and minimized government intervention have resulted in a radically decentralized approach to social service management that has not worked well for the child care system. Explanations that child care was developed and maintained to buttress the welfare system for needy families or to support increased employment for women are cited to rationalize the dismantling of care because it reinforces the breakdown of normal community self-help programs and constrains mothers from taking responsibility for their children. To the extent that the example of Alberta is a prototype of child care developments elsewhere, the analysis of developments and outcomes can assist in forewarning those who are concerned about the maintenance and development of public child care. (Contains 43 references.) (Author/KB)

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Neo-Conservatism and Child Care Services in Alberta: A Case Study

Occasional Paper No. 9

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Neo-Conservatism and Child Care Services in Alberta: A Case Study

Occasional Paper No. 9

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Abstract

The development and delivery of child care services in Canada has never been without controversy. Although stakeholders from opposing spheres of influence have battled for divergent demands, the concept that some form of support for child care falls within the realm of state responsibilities has been acknowledged for many decades.

In the 1990s, a political swing to the right is precipitating a reassessment of this principle. Child care advocates are finding that traditional goals for state support such as enhanced services, improved conditions for workers, increased accessibility, and higher standards of care are becoming secondary to fundamental debates about the need for any form of state intervention in services.

This paper describes the development of the child care system in the province of Alberta, shows how the role of the state (government) proceeded through four distinct phases, each determining a different outcome for child care stakeholders. Under the tenets of neo-conservatism, the current fifth phase is redefining the child care paradigm. To the extent that the example of Alberta serves as a prototype of child care developments elsewhere, the analysis of developments and outcomes can assist in forewarning those who are concerned about the maintenance and development of public child care as we know it.

Introduction

This paper uses the term *public child care* to refer to state policies regarding the control, funding and/or provision of care for children below compulsory school-age. Child care in Canada developed as a welfare service - providing care on a daily basis to children whose parent(s) was unable or unwilling to take on that responsibility. In the 1970s, child care experienced a redefinition, and burst upon the political agenda. Its emergence as a political issue was largely attributed to economic and social developments, and to effective pressure group activity, primarily from social justice and feminist oriented stakeholders. State support for out-of-home child care was seen to be a weapon to counter the social, employment, and economic inequalities which women in industrial societies had suffered.[1]

In the late 1990s, however, this concept is being revisited. Child care as a government-supported program is being assessed against a framework that promotes empowering citizens by devolving state responsibilities back onto individuals. These trends could result in the final demise of public child care as we know it.

From its inception, the juxtaposition of child care with women's issues, including the role of motherhood, guaranteed that the program would be controversial. In North America and elsewhere, state-funded child care policies and programs from 1970 to the mid-1990s have been at the centre of debates about the responsibilities of governments, employers and families toward the care of young children. This debate has generated some sensational media coverage, has been the focus of numerous task forces and committees of inquiry, and has borne the brunt of swings in funding and philosophical approaches. By the mid 1980s, after over a decade of political activity, child care services remained problematic. Despite increasing support to the area, reference was constantly being made to "the crisis of child care" (Parker, 1989; Hofferth & Phillips, 1987; Brown, 1982; Cooke, London, Edwards & Rose-Lizée, 1986; Kosterlitz, 1989). The child care "crisis" referred to demands which exceeded availability, unassessed standards of care, inaffordability, poor working conditions for staff resulting in high turnover rates, and dearth of regulated spaces resulting in extensive use of unregulated child care in potentially dangerous, or at least not optimal, environments for children.

As one American observer noted,

> [Child care policies have culminated in] a "nightmare" of alternative funding sources, regulations, eligibility requirements, and operational models of service (Stoddard, 1978, p. 133).

The state of child care was reflected in the conclusion of a Canadian federal government report as follows:

> To summarize, the analysis presented... leads us to the conclusion that present child care arrangements fall short of meeting the needs and the expectations of Canadian parents and children. Any realistic response to the current child care debate must take into consideration the great magnitude and the diversity of needs, and respond to the concerns of parents with regard to quality (Cooke et al., 1986, p.103).

By the 1980s, however, some improvements could be observed, at least in Canada. Although by no means solved, many issues which had arisen during the evolutionary phase of day care development had begun to be addressed. Increased usage had prompted mainstream acceptance of the concept of out-of-home care for young children as part of normal social functioning. Other improvements included: more stable funding from government sources; increased numbers of trained early childhood specialists; improved monitoring tools and systems; a more aware, more confident and more outspoken clientele (parent users); increased numbers of child care-related associations and professional advocates; and longitudinal studies which identified the benefits of high quality care. While shortages in accessibility and funding and a lack of national standards continued to cause concern, the state of child care structure and service was generally seen to be showing signs of movement toward defined goals.

In the 1990s, however, child care as a government-supported program which falls within the health, education and/or welfare sectors is facing a new type of crisis in Canada. Re-evaluation of the role of government in all sectors is resulting in new definitions for what are considered "essential services," along with new thrusts toward privatization and free market principles. This re-evaluation is causing the original argument about the need for public support for child care to be revisited. The story of child care in Alberta provides an example of the emergence, development and potential future for public child care systems in other jurisdictions where this re-evaluation and ideology are prevalent.

Choice of Alberta for case study

Alberta was chosen for a case study because its child care policy and programs exhibit both distinctive features and features common to other areas, and because Alberta represents a relatively isolated, "pure" case of child care policy development.

In one significant characteristic, child care in Alberta has been distinctive. As one Australian observer has noted, "the politics of child care in the 1980s is the politics of scarcity" (Jones, 1985, p. 446). In most jurisdictions, much of the child care literature and analyses has focussed upon the fact that governments have not met demands for service. However, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Alberta was the only jurisdiction in Canada to report a vacancy rate in its formal care system.

On the other hand, the way in which the Alberta government addressed this "universal" child care problem illuminates one of the most common features of child care politics - the contradictions and discrepancies which pervade the policy field. Through both its rhetoric and its actions, the Alberta government has given the overt appearance of embracing child care responsibility. In the mid-1980s, unusually low consumer costs characterized Alberta's child care program as did a high per capita number of spaces, a growth rate of more than 200% between

1977 and 1987, regulations which often reflected high standards of care,[2] and government funding for a variety of child care services.

Despite this seemingly progressive and prolific approach to public child care, however, the rhetoric of "crisis" did not abate in Alberta. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the provincial program and policies were severely criticized by both internal and external sources (Redican, 1978, p.163; Johnson & Dineen, 1981, p. 13; Alberta Committee on Children and Youth, 1982, p. 43; Cavenaugh, 1983, p. 63; Bagley, 1986, p. ii). Despite the plethora of child care developments in Alberta (which would have appeared to address many demands commonly raised by child care stakeholders), dissatisfaction reigned. Criticisms targeted inadequate monitoring, inconsistent approaches to child care service delivery, poor quality, and a perceived commitment to profit-making over that of the health and safety of children.

Another reason for choosing Alberta as a case study is that its government has been relatively autonomous in determining social policy. In Canada, social services fall under provincial jurisdiction. A major intervention by the federal government has been under the auspices of its national cost-shared program, the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). According to this program, provinces received matched funding for "approved" services for "approved" (needs or income tested) clients.[3] The stipulations which CAP placed upon distribution of federal funds did not have an influence upon child care policy development in Alberta, as the government rejected both the restrictions and much of the funding.

Further, there has been no change in the political party governing Alberta from the 1970s to the present. The autonomy and independence of the province, and its stable party politics, minimized the potential intervening variables and thus, to the extent possible, created a "pure" case of child care development.

In the mid 1990s, Alberta continues to reflect characteristics which are suitable for a case study. As in other jurisdictions, by 1995 those with concerns about the child care system were urging the consistency and commitment of government support. In Alberta, concerns over standards of care appeared less urgent due to a number of changes in the system throughout the 1980s. For example, a much-debated (although limited) staffing qualification had been enacted and enforced (until 1992, Alberta regulations had not included any staff training requirements). A *Licensing Policy Manual* which articulated specific criteria for meeting regulatory standards was distributed in 1992, initiating a harder line on noncompliance. A number of centres had licenses revoked by the province. A crackdown on fraud resulted in closures, arrests and even jail terms for some operators.

Meanwhile, in the late 1990s, Alberta is reflecting features of the"new order" approach to social policy that is increasingly common among the Western Anglo nations. Tenets of this new order include budget reductions in areas of welfare, education and health, along with decentralized community-based decision making, and the promotion of individual responsibility for actions. This latter principle targets recipients of welfare and other safety net allotments. The Alberta government has embraced these principles in rhetoric and policy actions.[4] Against this backdrop, the system of public child care hovers.

Historical developments: Child care in context

National context

At the 1975 Conference on the Family, the Vanier Institute identified the neglect of children in Canada as "the major threat to the future of our nation(s)". Between 1976 and 1983 the Canadian divorce rate increased by 65%. In the mid-1990s the labour force participation by women was 69.3%. By 1994, women in Canada constituted 45% of the total paid labour force. Those within the child rearing years - between the ages of 25 and 44 years - had the highest rate of participation (91%) of any age group of women (Lero & Johnson, 1994). Female workforce

participation rates promoted the need for child care services. The demand for public child care was further exacerbated by a surge of research in the 1960s and 1970s which emphasized the positive outcomes (or, at least, disavowed negative outcomes) of out-of-home care for children and mothers (Belsky & Steinberg, 1978), arousing demands for government support for a public system of child care.

During the 1970s, child care in Canada experienced an average yearly growth rate of 20% per annum.[5] Despite this growth rate, these years continued to be marked by shortages of spaces. In 1979, a mere 4% of children less than two years of age with working mothers were in child care centres or regulated family day care. Only 15.4% of children aged two years to six years in need of care because their mothers were in the labour force were in the formal (or regulated) child care system (Women's Bureau, 1979). The child care situation worsened throughout the 1980s: demand continued to outweigh service development and by 1984, the percentage of children aged from birth to twelve years in formal licensed child care had dropped to 8.8%. (Infant care had increased slightly and was now serving 8.7% of the population.) Thus, child care activity in Canada had two readings. There was a 20% increase per annum in gross number of spaces over a period of a number of years, which could be cited as proof of growth and government support; on the other hand the increasing demands rendered this growth ineffective and statistics showed a decrease in the percentage of children who were able to access regulated care. In the 1990s, the Canadian growth rate for child care spaces slowed considerably - from 7.6% in 1990 to 3.89% in 1991, and to 5.28% in 1992 (Health and Welfare Canada, 1990, 1991; National Child Care Information Centre, 1994).

While North American surveys conducted in the early to mid 1970s had identified informal care by relatives or neighbours as the preferred child care option (Young & Nelson, 1973; Krashinsky, 1977), those conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed that formal, licensed centre-based child care was the preferred option. Research further indicated that most parents found the preferred regulated child care extremely difficult to access (Johnson & Dineen, 1981; Health and Welfare Canada, 1980). Formal, licensed care has remained the first preference of child care users throughout the 1980s (Rosentraub & Harlow, 1983; Lero, 1985; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986), and into the 1990s (Lero & Johnson, 1994).

Alberta context

The first foray by the government of Alberta into the social policy area was the establishment of the Alberta Department of Public Welfare in 1944 which had mandated responsibility for child welfare, Métis issues, the *Domestic Relations Act*, the *Juvenile Court Act*, Old Age Pensions, and the Mothers' Allowance program. Despite the establishment of this department, the provincial government attempted to maintain an arm's-length approach to many social services, leaving the majority under the auspices of municipal, private or charitable organizations (Krewski, 1980).

It appears that during those times when the province of Alberta did intervene in social service provision, it proved itself to be particularly inept (Hornick, 1988, p. 46). A 1947 inquiry, for example, created a national scandal with its scathing criticism of provincial welfare practices (Whitton, 1947). Despite the ensuing criticism from numerous sources, the Alberta government did not visibly change its policies and practices (Krewski, 1980). These tendencies, both to ignore criticism from outside the province and to distance itself from direct social service delivery, were reflected throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the attitude of the province toward the privatization of social services, especially in the child care area.

During the decade commencing in 1971, Alberta experienced a 75% increase in workforce participation. Public spending increased from $1.1 billion in 1974 to $10.8 billion in 1985 and the number of civil servants grew by 200%. Boom times caused by oil revenues created a huge demand for employees, prompting incentives to increase the labour force participation of women. Incentives included some progressive equal employment legislation[6] and a commitment to increase the availability of child care.

In the 1990s, a trend toward provincial sovereignty arose in Canada (as it has a number of times before) (Guest, 1990). This translated into independent approaches to social policy and other programs for the provinces (Teghtsoonian, 1992). The 1996 dismantling by the federal government of the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP), which had established some provisos for use of federal funds to social welfare and social services, was indicative of this movement. Provinces were no longer to be accountable to the federal government, and needed to make no attempt to reflect national perspectives on social policy delivery. The way was cleared for Alberta and other provinces to expand individualistic programs based upon individual provincial ideologies.

Five phases of policy directions: Overt policies

Child care policy development in Alberta falls into five phases, each of which is characterized by a different (state) approach to the issue. The five phases are:

- Phase I (1942-1978) *Preprogram:* The state (government) is relatively noninterventionist in child care developments or delivery of services.
- Phase II (1978-1986) *Generous Allotments:* The state (government) provides generous funding with minimal restrictions to child care service providers.
- Phase III (1986-1993) *Regulatory Reform:* The state (government) becomes more interventionist and develops more rigorous standards of care for licensed services.
- Phase IV (1993-1995) *Fiscal Restraint:* The program appears to be driven by the aim to reduce funding.
- Phase V (1995) *Marginalization/Devolution:* The state (government) withdraws from intervention in child care and devolves responsibility onto private and/or community concerns.

The overt activity which marked each phase is described in Table 1. The observable government activity in the child care area resulted in some outcomes which were not always obvious nor predictable to observers and stakeholders. Descriptions of some contextual trends or events which were relevant to child care policy-making are also designated in Table 1.

Table 1

CHILD CARE POLICIES AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTS IN ALBERTA
1942 - 1996

Year	Phase I - Preprogram	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1942	Alberta signs Dominion-Provincial agreement for cost-sharing child care services.	Agreement is never implemented in Alberta.	
1957	Alberta Child Welfare Act outlines specifications for the licensing and inspection of nurseries and institutions caring for young children.	No program standards are included.	
1961	Child Welfare Amendments increase power of the government to inspect financial statements and defines conditions for the cancellation of licences.	No cancellations are implemented.	
1966	Federal government passes *Canada Assistance Plan* (CAP) authorizing federal cost-sharing of 50% of welfare services including child care for needy persons using the services of non-profit organizations.		
	The province continues to license for-profit centres.	Alberta counters federal policy which funds only non-profit social service organizations, and loses millions of dollars in cost-shared federal funding.	
	Preventive Social Services Act enables the province to fund 80% of municipally operated social services, including child care services. Municipalities fund only non-profit organizations.	Province funds only non -profit child care organizations.	
1970	*Child Welfare Act* is amended to further enable government authority, including the authority to access records and to conduct program reviews of all licensed facilities.	No standards for programs are developed. Inspections are infrequent and "toothless".	
	Edmonton and Calgary adopt Child Welfare League of America standards for the child care centres which they fund.	Municipal standards of care are high.	

Year	Phase I - Preprogram (continued)	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1972-1974	Edmonton and Calgary funding parameters further expanded by changes in CAP guidelines. Alberta continues to license for-profit child care centres which are not eligible for CAP cost-sharing funds.		More than 50% of women in Alberta are in the workforce. In urban areas, more than 33% of children below school-age have working mothers.
1977	The Province commissions Day Care Task Force and MLA Inquiry. Both bodies recommend a provincial takeover of child care, with substantially lower standards. The *Report of Day Care Task Force* also recommends the development of an administrative unit to oversee child care planning and implementation issues. *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act* is enacted.		Commercial operators with provincial licences object to municipal standards of care, and to their inability to access funding.

Year	Phase II - Generous Allotments	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1978	The *Day Care Regulation* is enacted. The regulation covers standards of care, application requirements and procedures for cancellation of licenses. A five-year phase-in period for new program standards is allowed.	The extended phase-in period drastically reduces the "bite" of the new regulations.	
	The *Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act* is enacted. The Committee comprises ten members of the public (appointed by government) and two members of the legislature and is given the mandate to engage in yearly inspections of licensed facilities including day care centres. A yearly report is to be tabled in Parliament.	Committee membership comprises party supporters.	
1980	Minister announces higher day care standards and a universal funding program called operating allowance. Payment averages $55.00 per child per month. Day Care Unit is established in Health Services Division of Alberta Department of Social Services and Community Health. Three employees are appointed to the unit.		Price Waterhouse Associates' *Report on Interprovincial Comparison of Day Care* shows Alberta with a low funding ratio for day care and middle to low standards when compared with the rest of Canada.

Year	Phase II - Generous Allotments (continued)	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1980, cont.	A Ministerial Advisory Committee on Day Care comprising private citizens and interested parties is established. The majority of Committee members are operators of commercial child care centres. *Day Care Regulation* is amended. Operating allowance program commences for all licensed operations, subsidizing the care of all children regardless of family income or of status (profit or non-profit) of organization.	Recommendations tend to favour the for-profit sector.	Early childhood professionals (non-profit operators) begin to form associations and advocacy groups.
	The provincial government completely takes over administration of the day care program from municipalities. Municipalities retain control of after-school programs and services. Changes to family subsidy program results in increased support to most users.	For-profit centres receive the same funding benefits as the non-profit centres.	
	Scandal in foster care facility results in a provincially commissioned inquiry into all social services (Cavenaugh Inquiry).	Changes to programs are delayed during the span of the inquiry.	
1981	*Day Care Regulation* is amended to reflect more rigorous standards of care.	Many regulations are not enforced.	
	Day Care operating allowances are revised. Average payment is $115 per child per month.	Care for all children and families (despite income and/or need) receives support.	
	Day Care Advisory Committee recommends a training registry for day care workers.	No action is taken.	
	The number of child care centres expands rapidly.	Overburdened provincial employees are unable to maintain monitoring standards and to enforce regulations.	
	Social Care Facilities Review Committee *Annual Report* cites "high standards of care in day care centres in Alberta."	This does not correspond with derogatory reports published by a variety of sources.	
1982	Alberta-commissioned Price Waterhouse Associates *Interprovincial Comparison* cites "Alberta is first in the nation on many variables."	Standards relating to staff training (i.e., there are no requirements) are not mentioned.	

Year	Phase II - Generous Allotments (continued)	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1982, cont.	Decentralization of the Department of Social Services.	Regional priorities result in the elimination of many child care-oriented functions of staff and reduced monitoring of child care standards.	
1983	*Cavenaugh Report* is released. Universal funding of child care is criticized, as is the "gross profit-making" of the commercial day care sector. Day care facilities continue to expand. Provincial child care expenditures increase accordingly while internal human resources and administration budget are reduced.	Recommendations are not acted upon. Level of government intervention is reduced.	
1983-1986	Numerous structural and personnel changes in administration of Child Care Services take place.	Employees are decreasingly able to monitor child care due to other responsibilities.	

Year	Phase III - Regulatory Reform	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1986		Alberta continues to lose millions of dollars because of the lack of federal cost-sharing for the funding of commercial programs.	
	A freeze on day care subsidies is announced. New regulations on first aid training and crib specifications are enacted.	In spite of the freeze, 360 new spaces subsequently receive funding and Family Day Home Administrators receive a 5% raise.	
1987	Evaluation system is piloted. Enforcement system is piloted. *Licensing Policy Manual* is developed and given to all operators for clarifying expected standards of care.	No action follows the pilot period. No action follows the pilot period.	
	Five day care centres are closed for noncompliance.	Four of these re-open after being heard by a government-appointed Appeal Board.	

Year	Phase III - Regulatory Reform (continued)	Outcomes	Contextual trends
1988	Case loads of licensing officers are reduced to improve monitoring and enforcement practices.		
1987-1989	Throne speech gives message that "the major responsibility for child rests with parents." Brochures on *Choosing a Day Care Centre/Family Day Care* are developed to assist parents in making good choices.		
1990-1991	*White Paper on Day Care Program* is released; emphasizes need for staff training, changes in funding distribution, and increased auditing of staff (criminal records and of fraudulent claims for operating allowance). *Day Care Regulation* is amended to include staff training qualifications and grandual decreasing operating allowance in favour of increased subsidies to low income users.		
1992	More rigorous intervention, higher standards of care and more accountable funding mechanisms are put in place; new policy manual which provides more precise interpretations of regulations is distributed; funds are shifted from operating grants to subsidies; staff training requirements are phased in.		
1993	Cost reduction for family day home administration. More rigorous monitoring of service plans for day care centres. Complaint investigation is improved. Staff training requirements are phased in.		A child is killed in a day care centre in Edmonton. Case is deemed preventable death

Year	Phase IV - Fiscal Restraint	Outcomes	Contextual Trends
1994	Departmental child care employees are given training on how to investigate for fraud. Funding for Family Day Home operators is reduced. Training standards for child care directors are enacted. Maximum children allowed for unlicensed child care increases from three to six children. Increase in subsidy recipients as welfare is reduced.		Fraud and error control became a major focus of the Department of Family and Social Services. The Annual Report of Department highlights the number of criminal charges laid (367) along with the number of services and/or individuals who received support.

Year	Phase IV - Fiscal Restraint (continued)	Outcomes	Contextual Trends
1995	The provincial Day Care Program identifies its major goals for the first five-year plan. These are to "ensure greater accountability," and to "support parents to be more effective in their primary role of selecting and monitoring care." Budget targets a decrease in day care funding of $13 million over three years.		Department develops a business plan based on a "benchmark" process whereby concrete performance indicators are identified and targets developed. The plan supersedes advocacy as targets for action.

Year	Phase V - Marginalization/Devolution	Outcomes	Contextual Trends
1995-1996	Authority service plans have a child welfare and income support focus. Newly released *Report of the Ombudsman* states Day Care Programs "functions in virtual isolation from the rest of the Department. [It is] not even on the agenda with executive committee" (Office of the Ombudsman, Province of Alberta, 1995).	The need for monitoring and accountability for quality of day care programs is not highlighted in any goal statement or planning document.	Department begins process of dismantling the welfare system. Seventeen Regional Authorities are developed whose mandate will be complete control of all social services.

Power mechanisms and covert policy making

There is reason to believe that the final phase, marginalization of child care programs, has its seeds in previous state approaches. Despite political activity over many decades, child care as a public program was never entrenched. This is because political allotments to the child care program have mostly focussed upon distributions rather than upon constitutional elements.[7] That is, activities were targeted at appeasing interest groups by distributing "goods" to meet demands. Generous allotments overshadowed the fact that infrastructures were never developed to support the program. The entrenchment of the program within mainstream government functioning and community acceptance was thus avoided.

Indeed, constitutional elements may have been purposefully avoided to keep child care out of mainstream social developments. Policy analysts from other areas have referred to covert processes of policy making whereby some goals remain unarticulated but blatant in their ability to drive political activities. This may be true of child care in Alberta (and elsewhere). Lukes (1974), for example, describes how government and bureaucrats have at their disposal power mechanisms which can be used to support and/or to sabotage policy development and implementation. While there is no proof of a long standing conspiracy to marginalize child care in Alberta, there is equally no evidence that the government and bureaucratic decision makers were committed to the development and entrenchment of the program. The government of Alberta may have used these power mechanisms to implement a covert child care policy of non-entrenchment. Thus, despite the appearance of support for a child care program which addressed the demands from numerous stakeholders, policies reflected a lack of commitment to the program and/or an interest primarily in the entrepreneurial elements of child care delivery. The following

outlines the way in which certain power mechanisms mitigated against strengthening the child care system in Alberta.

The mechanisms are:

1) failure to develop a bureaucratic infrastructure;

2) the creation of tensions in the child care community;

3) limiting resources for policy implementation; and

4) delaying action by studying the issue.

1) Failure to develop a bureaucratic infrastructure

Personnel and administrative reshuffling characterized the child care program in Alberta. The instability within the Ministry prevented a bureaucratic infrastructure for child care from developing, and resulted in "schizophrenic avenues of communication" (Alford, 1975) and decision-makers who were not accountable for long-term implications.

Responsibility for the planning and delivery of child care programs moved from the Health Unit, to Social Services, to Community Day Programs, to Family Services, and finally to a separate Day Care Unit in 1988. The outcome of these shifts was that no individual or structure was affiliated with the area over any substantial amount of time. The moves caused disruption to ongoing policies and plans. Constant changes in personnel and Ministers made it virtually impossible for a child care specialist/advocate within the bureaucracy or the Legislative Assembly to emerge with a commitment towards, and long-term perspective on the area. Those bureaucrats who were responsible for liaising with the child care community and for keeping the Minister informed of issues were constantly transferred out of the area after very short incumbencies. Even the Minister with responsibility for the child care program and the Deputy Minister of Social Services were subject to unusually short-term appointments during the 1980s. The establishment of a formal or informal relationship between bureaucrats and the public wishing to raise issues became difficult. Stakeholders with grievances literally did not know to whom to turn. The role of front-line staff to gather information from the child care constituency and to transmit needs and concerns to decision-makers was also undermined by the administrative changes and lack of consistent infrastructures mentioned above. The process of constant political and administrative changes served thus to diffuse the focus of lobby efforts and to create confusion throughout the child care system.

Decision-makers were not accountable for long-term implications

In any policy area, it is common for politicians and bureaucrats to make policies which reflect a quick and visible "fix" for political issues so that the improvement is associated with the presiding incumbent (Ham & Hill, 1986, p.131-148). Under the conditions of imminent personnel changes in Children's Services, this customary practice of implementing short-term visible or temporary solutions to child care problems was exacerbated. There are at least three examples of this short-term planning: the establishment of investigative committees to study the issue of staff training in response to vigorous criticism over this omission in the day care regulations; the redefinition of space requirements when operators complained about this overly rigorous regulation; and the announcement of a legislated first-aid requirement for all staff following the death of a child in a day care centre.

In the first case, the establishment of a staff training study group constituted action which appeased the lobbyists (the study continued on and off for more than ten years with no outcome). In the second instance, the redefinition

of play space to include bathrooms and hallways appeased the lobbyists but negated the original intent of the regulation (to ensure adequate play space for children in groups). This solution was prescribed by a different set of individuals from those who had developed the original play space legislation so that a commitment to the original intent (and even the understanding of it) was minimal. The quick fix of a first-aid training requirement for child care workers was similarly insubstantial. The lack of available training programs by which the required credential could be awarded caused waiting lists for training of up to one year. Meanwhile, the 60% to 80% annual turnover in child care staff rendered the enforcement of this requirement impossible. Nonetheless, the speed with which the announcement of the new regulation was made gave the impression of an immediate response to a serious deficiency in the child care regulations. By the time the impotency of this new regulation became apparent, a new provincial Director of Child Care was in place who could blame the previous administration for the poor planning, and/or who could delay, reform, or cancel the previous policy decision without appearing foolish.

2) The Creation of Tensions in the Community

Government support may have been used to reinforce divisions within the child care community by weighting the influence of certain groups. The creation of Advisory and other influential committees resulted in conflict with professional groups and associations who felt that they had more authority to comment on child care-related issues than did the "lay" people chosen. Government-created groups appeared to be slanted in membership toward an entrepreneurial perspective on child care. As shown above, the creation of and deference to Advisory Committees excused decision-makers from responsibility for unpopular decisions (and for non-decision-making). Similarly, by exacerbating the conflicts between oppositional child care groups, the government was able to focus energy upon debates about the representation of committees instead of upon fundamental child care issues (MacGregor, 1984; Bella, 1981).

3) Limiting Resources

A third power mechanism which government uses to sabotage their own policies is to limit resources for implementation. In Alberta, constant reductions in administration and personnel budgets, exacerbated by nonrestrictive growth in the number of centres, served to reduce the effectiveness of staff in implementing those policies which were ostensibly directed at increased regulatory (quality) intervention.

4) Studying an Issue to Delay Action

A fourth power mechanism described by Lukes as a means of sabotaging policy implementation is that of delaying activity while studying an issue/concern. This strategy was used frequently in Alberta. Review and planning activities characterized much of the administrative attention to the child care area within the bureaucracy. After many months (sometimes years), policy changes emanating from the subsequent studies and reports would tend to be minor or would never materialize. For example, after two years of study (during which any questions on day care standards were postponed "until the evaluation of the pilot project is completed") no action was taken on an evaluation system for day care centres. Similarly, a *Family Day Home Review* resulted in (eighteen months after its inception) a recommendation for higher child/provider ratios (not implemented), and in a slight increase in funds (later reduced again). The *Workplace Day Care Review* (developing strategies for the encouragement of workplace child care) was never completed. The *White Paper on Day Care Reform* (1989), which addressed changes in the funding of child care, superseded workplace child care as the issue of the day. The latter paper recommended that some proposed regulatory and funding changes be phased in over a five-year period. The study on *Children with Special Needs in Day Care* (one year in preparation) culminated in a set of revised guidelines for care which were only minimally different from the original document. A paper on *Infant Care* was still in progress when there was a change of Minister. The issue was deemed no longer topical and the study was dropped. The *Review of Operating Allowance Accountability* generated a second study into contracting with all

child care operators. The implementation plan was assessed to be too labour intensive during a time of personnel cutbacks and the plan was dropped. A *Report on Parent Involvement* was never sent forward for discussion at decision-making levels.

Covert policy developments result in marginalization of child care

State support for child care in Alberta has been one of distributions. That is, the government distributed funds, made policies, provided support services, and delivered programs. Constitutional elements, however, have not been apparent. The government did not display commitment to the concept of public child care; it did not develop stable infrastructures to support child care; nor did it articulate a goal for the program beyond the response to pressure groups' demands. In fact, the government may have employed its power mechanisms to mitigate against the development of a sustainable infrastructure for the system. The result of this approach is reflected in a 1995 report from the Office of the Provincial Ombudsman:

> Day Care Programs functions in virtual isolation from the rest of the Department... components operate in isolation from each other ("islands within islands"). There is an absence of supervisory and management control... (and) poor communication amongst different arms of the Department (Office of the Ombudsman, 1995, p.1, 10).

The marginalization of the child care system in Alberta has made it an easy target for those promoting a neo-conservative approach to policy-making and delivery of services.

The neo-crisis: Principles of neo-conservatism and their application to child care

Alberta, along with many other jurisdictions in the Western Anglo world, has embraced a political ideology often referred to as "neo-conservatism". A neo-conservative approach to government targets the need to control deficits and debt, and embraces fiscal principles of the market economy before all others. Thus, social programs are de-emphasized in light of increased support for industry or for cutting government deficits. Cuts in taxes are promoted in order to increase cash flow and boost the economy. Decreased government spending, privatization, and minimized government intervention (deregulation) are promoted in as many areas as possible to "increase efficiency."

Strategies to achieve these fiscal goals are borrowed from the corporate world and include: distribution of control; bottom-up management; decentralization; collaborative, adaptive and flexible structures; and incremental, "natural" development (that is, development that builds upon itself, grows from its own momentum). A central principle of this neo-conservatism is the valuing of diversity, change, and the appreciation of local differences and needs (Kelly, 1994; Collins, 1994).

In Alberta, these principles have been translated into a provincial mandate to "empower the people." The policy of empowering the people aims to reduce dependency on government, including unwarranted dependency on welfare and safety-net programs. Strategies for achieving this include: reduced taxes and subsidies for business aimed at attracting employment-oriented corporations to the province; reductions in public health care (under a push to privatize delivery) in order to create a more efficient program; the development of "charter" schools which devolve more control to parents; the removal of mandatory kindergarten services as a way to empower school boards to disseminate funds according to local demand and/or to charge fees for this and other so-called frill services.[8]

The strategies above have been implemented through a radically decentralized approach to social service

management. The provincial government has developed Regional Authorities through which all welfare and related services are to be delivered. The Authorities are to be run by local community groups and volunteers - not by professional bureaucrats. They are to be given budgets based upon their own service plans and to contract directly with service providers (such as child welfare social workers). There are no directions or standards for the level of training/expertise for which the Authorities will contract. There is no base line safety net which each authority is mandated to provide.[9]

This move towards regionalization directly reflects the corporate principles described above. In theory, this system represents the ultimate in distribution of power and bottom-up control. Clients (communities) not only deliver social services, they develop those they need and deliver them according to their own standards. The system is simple and incremental. Authorities will build upon the services they need/want as the system develops. Reviewed service plans and revised goals will direct development. Diversity is implicit. No authority need copy the goals/plans/model of any other authority for any given standard. In Alberta, there will be seventeen Authorities with different systems based upon seventeen uniquely community-oriented needs. Any Authority who develops a new approach to service delivery and/or prevention will be encouraged to experiment. Change and growth are built into the system as membership on Authorities changes and new needs are recognized and dealt with. The Regional Authorities are natural service delivery vehicles in this concept (that is, they emerge from grass roots, build upon themselves, and develop their own momentum.) They *are* the community. They set their own standards. They are self-generating, and self-organizing. For some programs regionalization may work well, but this is not true for the child care system.

Child care as a means to other ends

The Albertan example has shown that child care was primarily developed and maintained for reasons other than the provision of high quality group experiences for children before the onset of compulsory schooling. Child care was developed to buttress a welfare system for needy families and/or to support increased employment. These same purposes, used to justify the program, are cited within a neo-conservative framework to rationalize government withdrawal from the program. The arguments for dismantling of child care are: 1) child care as a welfare service reinforces the break down of "normal" community self-help programs; and 2) child care as a female equity program constrains mothers from taking responsibility for their offspring.

Child care as a welfare service reinforces the break down of "normal" community self-help programs

The public system of child care becomes a welfare program when it is associated with supporting employment options for welfare recipients who have young children, and with preventative placements for at-risk children. In this way, the need for a public system of child care springs up only when there has been a failure by parents, family, and/or the community to assume their responsibilities. The solution to this problem can then be framed in terms of community involvement in preventative programs, and/or increased familial responsibility for providing appropriate at-home experiences. This perspective provides an argument to counter government involvement in child care. If women are unable to care for their children, a more empowered community will ensure that neighbours and/or church/community services develop to provide support as necessary.

Child care as a female equity program constrains mothers from taking responsibility for their offspring

Similarly, when child care is associated with women's equity rights, its role becomes iniquitous. Social policies have buoyed the women's movement from its inception. With improved education, equal employment opportunities, child care support, and other policies, women have been successful in the last few decades in

moving away from dependence upon men. From a neo-conservative perspective, women are seen to have switched from dependency on men (husbands), to dependency on the state. The state, under liberal policies, provided the funds and means by which women were able to access training, along with support services such as child care and affirmative action programs. The state also hired women who predominate in government-funded positions like teaching, nursing and social services. Under neo-conservative tenets of individual responsibility, women are encouraged to turn away from dependence on the state, and back to reliance upon their families (husbands/men). A reduction in readily accessible child care services can then be framed as a positive move towards less dependence upon the state. Indeed, reductions in employment opportunities for women can also be viewed positively. Women who are not in the workforce will be more readily available for a myriad of voluntary positions. Women who are without employment can have at-home careers and may be available to provide alternatives to government-supported services like child care, kindergartens, hospitals, and services for the elderly. In this concept, this is seen to provide a higher quality of service delivery than state institutional care.

There is, however, one aspect of child care that remains valued in the neo-conservative framework. Single women are encouraged by the government to forgo welfare and to return to work as soon after the birth of their child as possible. For these women, child care needs to be accessible, although there is no particular call for regulated, high quality, professional care options.

Conclusion: The neo-crisis

With the auditing of all publicly provided services to establish their essentiality, child care does not fare well. The tenets of neo-conservatism are contraindicated for a public system of child care on many fronts. A public child care system is, by definition, monitored by public servants, and neo-conservative ideology eschews government bureaucracy. The concept of government-imposed, centralized standards are viewed as counter to the needs and diversity of each community/individual. In this way, community control over services reinforces an anti-professional bias. Community control can become the means to disassociate professional associations, unions, and other infrastructures which have developed professional and standardized approaches to service delivery. As standards and monitoring are devolved to the "industry," child care programs become targets for deregulation, trained, external monitors of child care are considered overly interventionist, and the concept of accountability by any agent other than the consumer (parents) is debatable. Meanwhile, to the extent that child care is articulated as a family (mother) responsibility, it will fall outside the essential service category and become a target for streamlining government programs.

Another tenet of neo-conservatism is the use of community representatives/volunteers to develop and deliver social services, wherever possible.[10] In Alberta, the government has promised to maintain legal authority for acts where warranted. The *Social Care and Facility Licensing Act* governs child care regulations which describe minimal standards of care. Although the regulations are supported by policy manuals, these provide guidelines only to operators. They are not mandated for licensing or funding, are open for interpretation on many clauses, and do not give direction for consultation and/or development. When Regional Authorities (who, as voluntary officers, are unlikely to possess early childhood expertise) become responsible for development and delivery of child care services, the quality focus may be less than predominant. When Authorities are forced to live within negotiated budgets and service plans, it is unlikely that they will put in place labour intensive consultative systems, and/or that they will invest the hundreds of hours of documentation which it now takes to succeed in closing down a non-compliant service deliverer. Professional development, experimentation with new ways and means of program delivery, the search for excellence over efficiency, and a professional approach to services are not likely to permeate the culture of volunteer Regional Authorities.

The battle for public support of an out-of-home child care system has always been played out against a traditional, conservative opposition. The historical review of policy development and the analyses of covert policy implementation in the province have shown that available, accessible, high quality child care in Alberta has always been somewhat of a myth - but in the past there was acquiescence by all stakeholders to the value of these goals. Under present structures, the value of child care is being promoted solely for its association with workforce/workfare participation of single mothers. Non-formal care is promoted over a top-down, "institutionalized" (read professional) model. The precarious foundation of the child care system, and its lack of a constitutional legacy, has made child care a particularly easy target for dismantling .

Neo-conservative ideology plays upon the deepest fears created by modern society. Rapid change is creating alienation, disorientation and distrust within the average citizen - and neo-conservatism is offering some (albeit simplistic) answers: regain control over your own life - and let others take care of themselves; become self-reliant and stronger by making do with less; re-establish the traditional role for women;[11] return to a mythical community-spirited past.

A warning?

The historical overview shows how the child care program in Alberta has focused upon distributional allotments aimed at appeasing stakeholders. Meanwhile, power mechanisms may have been employed to prevent the development of a constitutional infrastructure upon which the system could be rooted. Political, economic and social changes are now shaking the precarious foundations of the system. Evidence indicates that a public system, reliant upon publicly- funded personnel to monitor and develop the program, will disappear.

In Alberta, the few voices raised in protest about the demise of the child care system are finding increasingly fewer vehicles through which to be heard. Can this be prevented elsewhere?

There may be reason to believe that the stages of state intervention in child care in Alberta (minimum intervention; generous funding; regulatory reform; fiscal restraint; and marginalization) represent a cycle which may be replicated in other constituencies. Issues to consider are: Does generous funding by government without concomitant articulated purpose result in and/or encourage the development of opposing pressure groups? Is regulatory reform which takes place after a phase of "generosity" doomed to fail because some groups, practices and expectations are now entrenched? When rhetoric begins to elucidate the welfare/equity goals of the child care system, is this a way of preparing the ground for a phase of marginalization? These are warning signs that should be heeded.

Many elements in the development and decline of child care services in Alberta are visible in other areas. This analysis might assist in preventing decline elsewhere. The positive aspects of the trend towards neo-conservatism can be exploited. Community-driven services, for example, can be models of excellence. The critical issue is that the demand for quality care and child-centred programs needs to come from the users. Professionals and others who care about children need to publicize the importance of high standards of care - and what this means. A focus upon the universal goals of child care - benefits to the child - needs to be rigorously stressed at all times. At the same time, child care advocates and stakeholders should focus their demands to governments upon constitutional dimensions of the program, and be wary of distributions which are as easily withdrawn as they are handed out.

Endnotes

1. This is a common purpose for public support for child care programs. Indeed, in a recent review, Lubeck (1995) asserts that France may be the only western industrialized nation who has developed a system of child care to meet child centred (not economic) goals. In both policy and practice the French early childhood program exists in order to "welcome children into French society" (Lubeck, 1995).

2. While Alberta's lack of a training requirement was scandalously out of step with regulations in most other jurisdictions, its child/staff ratios and its regulation on group size were among the most stringent in the nation. The space requirement (square footage per child) and Regulation #14 - that each day care centre "must have a program which meets the developmental needs of the children in care" - were both, similarly, progressive at the time (Price Waterhouse Associates, 1980).

3. See Friendly (1994) for a description of the role that the federal government played until 1996 through the Canada Assistance Plan in the funding and directing of some aspects of child care services. The Canada Assistance Plan was eliminated in 1996 by the government of Canada.

4. This approach is reflected by comments such as the following:

   The government should get out of rather than into the lives of Albertans (Premier Ralph Klein, Speech to the Throne, *Hansard*, August 31, 1993, p. 10.)

   Welfare reforms will focus on putting people to work, instead of encouraging chronic dependence (Premier Ralph Klein, Speech to the Throne, *Hansard*, August 31, 1993, p. 9).

   The phasing out of direct government responsibility for service delivery needs to continue. (Alberta Commission of Services for Children, *Finding a Better Way*, November, 1994, p. 6).

   There is going to be a sorting out of what is essential and what isn't essential. (Premier Ralph Klein cited in *Alberta Report*, January 31, 1994, p. 6).

   The solution for employable clients who aren't interested in education or training programs are bus tickets out of the province... Lots of single mothers have left for B.C. (There) they can sit on welfare until their kids reach 18. (In Alberta single mothers lose welfare benefits when their child reaches 6 months of age.) (Bob Scott, Spokesperson for the Department of Family and Social Services, cited in *Alberta Report*, April 3, 1995, p. 12.)

5. A brief decrease took place in 1977 when many provinces were undergoing a period of economic restraint. During this year a change in subsidy requirements resulted in the exclusion of many two parent families from regulated child care. These families tended to retreat from the formal system in search of cheaper alternatives. However, by 1979, the child care field had recovered and 93, 853 spaces were available throughout Canada (Health and Welfare Canada, 1980).

6. The *Individual's Rights Protection Act* of 1972 (amended in 1980) was very progressive for its time. The *Act* prohibited discrimination in employment on a number of grounds including sex and marital status. Wage discrimination for males and females performing similar duties in the same location was also prohibited.

7. Analysts have noted two dimensions of policy making. Policies are said to focus on distributional and/or constitutional dimensions. These two components are explained in Creighton as follows:

> The distributional dimension of policy relates to the allotment of the tangible benefits across various interests in society. The constitutional dimention relates to the allocation of positions of influence in the making and implementation of policy (Creighton, 1995:249).

In the child care area, distributions refer to concrete, measurable allocations such as dollars and spaces. Constitutional allotments refer to variables such as infrastructures, status, decision-making positions, political influence and other components which result in the empowerment/entrenchment of the field.

8. In 1994, Alberta became one of two provinces in Canada not to offer universal access to a kindergarten program (the other is Prince Edward Island).

9. A similar form of decentralization has been applied to the educational system in the form of "charter schools." Charter schools allow boards of parents to receive direct grants based on a submitted plan which outlines services to be rendered. On acceptance of the charter, individual schools retain full control over staffing and other aspects of educational delivery. Neither teachers nor curriculum goals need adhere to any provincial model, so that training of staff, salaries, duties and other components of the educational system are not obliged to meet any given standard.

10. The reliance on volunteers, while noble in principle, is less than realistic in terms of statistics which show that over 85% of parents are in the workforce and therefore not available to provide services which have been associated with state support (Lero & Johnson, 1994).

11. An editorial in the Calgary Sun recently bemoaned social diseases such as the increase in divorce rates, juvenile crime, illegitimate births, single parent homes, teen suicide, and the decrease in scholastic aptitude scores (!). These trends, concludes the writer, are a result of the evils of day care. He declares that

> *The solution would therefore seem to be this: Women should have their children in their 20s, stay home and raise them, and resume (or assume) their careers in their 40s when their kids are in university. They might not enjoy the same career advantage. But what they could enjoy is both their children and grand children. And many regard this as more important.* (Day-care Delusion, *Calgary Sun*, August 27, 1995:6)

The readership is not told who these "many" are.

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